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[Music]

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**Tom Kelley:**

Okay, so next stop. Our next speaker is Michael Jager, who reports that he started his career essentially working for groceries at a tiny design firm in Vermont. And as he told that me that story I imagined him on a street corner in Burlington with the sign, you know, "Will design for food." You know, in Adobe Garamond Extended on a nice piece of foam core, something like that. But that's what he reported, you know, he worked for groceries but after that modest beginning, Michael went directly onto co-founding his own successful design firm, Jager Di Paola Kemp. No, I just said that wrong, Jager Di Paola Kemp, and this is very important and I got it wrong, because Michael is obviously the J in JDK. His wife, Paula, is the Giovanna Di Paola, is the D. So if she's on the audience, my apologies for that. Anyway, the firm got some of its early street credibility by putting Burton snowboards on the map almost 20 years ago and they've done great creative work for a very diverse clientele ever since. Although the firm has now grown to a hundred people with offices here in New York and Portland, Oregon, Michael is living proof you can achieve design success without ever moving out of Vermont. So please welcome Michael Jager.

[Applause]

[Music]

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**Michael Jager:**

Cool. Hi AIGA. Welcome back from lunch. "So I'll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours." Bob Dylan said that. "Love unlearning," I said that. I'm clearly no Bob Dylan. But I am a lover of collaboration and I think collaboration is in an evolutionary state at this point where it really needs care and nurturing because it is radically, radically evolving and I think our industry needs to protect it and nurture it and guide it. I think we need to love it -- love it through. So I have a couple of things, I think, as we look at the evolution of collaboration that we should consider. One of the things that I think will help us to give you a little bit of context, at least for my humble little perspective about it. And I did a little exercise preparing for this, that hopefully you'll find interesting. Because I think lot of what collaboration has to do with is the time commitment you put into it, and the relationships that you have, and just how deep and rich you'll go with the people that you're working with. So I'm 49 years old -- I did a little experiment online with this. I wanted to look into the future of it. So I'm 49 years old but actually been designing for over 30 years, it's pretty what I've been committed to, that and throwing some hay bales and painting houses along the way, I guess. And I did this projection looking at how, you know, based on health, running, what you're eating, what you're doing, you put this measure and I get a projected lifespan, life expectancy to age 95. Pretty cool. I was like, "Damn that's -- that's not too bad." That actually could be a good life. Which leaves 46 years, so I'm on the back end of my life odometer. And that 46 years gives you 16, 790 days, that's cool. You can get a lot done in 16, 790 days so I seem pretty excited about that. But it's 552 months that you have left, and that's if you don't end up going down in some tunnel of metal in flames somewhere, and you actually manage to survive everything that can happen to us all. But 552 months. And then that, in the end, is also 2392 weekends -- and not that I live for the weekends, I don't at all. I love my job. I love design but it is a measure that's really important when you look at those markers and you look at who you

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spend your time with. And I think that has a lot to do with collaboration. We need to think, as an industry, about who we're spending our time with. Why? What we're helping them do? Why is very important when you think about the future of collaboration, so this is a little bit of a measure for me that I looked at when I think about how -- where do we spend our time and with whom.

So from here, I started to think about let's -- why don't we dissect collaboration? What are the parts? What are the elements? All -- it's a beautiful thing when the symphony of multidiscipline design comes together and you really can bring these parts together in unique ways. There is beauty in the intersections and the overlaps. It can be -- it can be such an amazing thing when the harmonies come together and you get this -- you get these experiments that, they are beautiful collisions that happen. So as you start to break apart collaboration and look at the different components in it, there definitely is a change in how companies are perceiving collaboration. When I actually -- it was interesting Tom mentioned earlier about, you know, months and months ago when we're thinking about, "What the hell are we gonna talk about here?" and I committed to collaboration, I thought, "That will be it, I love collaboration." It's so important right now and then Danny Deutsch has "Collaboration NOW" on CNBC, it's like awesome. It was like, perfect time. But what was interesting about that, it was a very big, corporate, mass presentation and it continues to be; there is, I think there's four more shows to go. It's very interesting, but it shows how business is embracing collaboration in a huge way, which means we have to really respond and be aware of how that is being bent and twisted and shifted and moved. So the companies are demanding a change in how we interact and how we work and how we collaborate. It is really shifting as the agency -- the traditional ad-agency world crumbles and shifts. It really changes the relationship of the design studios, and companies are demanding a new relationship. So if you slide down to the other end of the world, you'll see another thing as far as what happens at the end of the world. This little box. Not in the distant past, creativity -- we would go out as designers and we would get our briefs and we would hang out with the client. We'd get -- be curious and pull this knowledge and we will go back into our little magic box and we would create ideas and come back and hopefully the "ta da!" would be brilliant solutions that they would see as magical and insightful and wonderful. The box has been completely destroyed. I love the theater of that. I thought it was a beautiful thing. That box is long gone. The blurring of boundaries between clients and creative and the design world and the agency world is completely erased. I don't know how many of you have hired clients and have clients hire people that work with you; the boundaries are gone. Everybody creates. Everybody wants the box destroyed. Everyone is involved. Everyone is creative and that's part of what the future of collaboration is about. Are you brave enough to participate in that -- in that new world of collaboration so the box is history. You continue to move around and look at what exists. There is ratio then. So if the box is erased, the ratio that -- who controls what in the collaborative process then becomes the debate. Who is doing what? Where does the job begin and end? How does that -- how does that interaction happen? So that means, we need to become masters at that component. Ideally, what it will shift to is a mentality that's more like a lab -- a creative lab where you have this alchemy that really is a catalyst for change and really is a catalyst for creativity and just curiosity. That's the model that we've been shifting toward and really exploring. It's pretty fearless, roll up your sleeves with the clients and create together.

And one of the case studies I'll note here is with Levi's. We did a thing a few years ago with Levi's innovation team called the Denim Mind. We actually coined it a collaboratory and we took Levi's through a concept where we did the super collider experience that started with two days in New York, hitting shops, hanging out with the audience, spending time together looking at future trends. We stayed in New York for two days and then we took everybody to

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Vermont. We had 7 creative directors from all over the world from Levi's. We had our graphic designers, marketing people, strategy people, their industrial designers, engineers that were designing the machines to make future denim pieces from all over the world, we took this team, about 20 people went into Vermont and created the simultaneous sort of synchronized moving creative process of five different teams that were actually making denim. At the same time as those ideas were being created, you were naming it, telling the story, figuring out the packaging, the whole synchronization of thinking was happening all at once with five teams and then that was turned into a gallery at the end. That "roll up your sleeves" and just completely create right beside the client. Created the Levi's organic cotton push and in the red wire project that they did were based in those pieces. There were 3 or 4 other innovations that happened as well. But the collaboratory and the fearless kind of willingness to say we've never done this before but we can design an experience that is more like a lab and less like a box. So exploring further, you have to also not make it boring, you have to be willing to take risk. Going in and just quoting the same bullshit marketing books and just hallow promises from, you know, used-up brand books and things, you gotta get in there and roll up your sleeves and make. That's something that is really exciting so you can't be boring with it. You've got to be fearless with what you're doing in the process. If you are willing to mix it up, you can get anagrams that do all kinds of really interesting things. You never quite know what you're going to get. It is a labor of love. It takes a lot of work. You have to be willing to put in the time, the commitment of time with the client. The commitment of time with the process is really a crucial thing to understand. It is not easy. It is a labor. One other case that I'll talk about is Burton Snowboards. We have worked with Burton for 20 years. We have a relationship that is very deep with them. We've actually helped to be kind of a catalyst for the snowboard culture. One of the projects that we do with Burton in the process that's unique and interesting is the board graphics. There's about 135 boards in the line each year, now it's grown to that at this point. Every top and base is different. It's a very complex massive project. What's beautiful about it, it is multidiscipline and cross cultural where you have pro-snow boarders who are spending 325 days a year on this product and have a deep personal relationship to it, working side by side with engineers that are creating the future of the technology that will build the boards, working with graphic designers, working with artists all over the world. It's this incredible network of creativity that takes an entire year to birth this new wave of sort of cultural commentary on snowboards. It's a really fascinating, great project. At the same time, there are changes that are happening there and as an example as the pace of business has accelerated, one thing that has surfaced is the demand for using existing art and not always having the time or the budget to create new art. And just like the stock photography world and some of the dimensions that introduces to what we do, when art becomes decoration and it is purchased in a hollow context, that is not collaboration. And we are working with Burton side by side making sure that the relationships we have when we do buy existing art that it's a relationship about how that art is used? How are you bringing it in to the process? how are you managing it? What is the technology and the techniques that you're using to manage it. It's still about a relationship with the artist that's created it. You really have to protect that even if you're pushed into a place where you got to use existing art as one example. We cannot let collaboration be decoration. There are a lot of brands, if you look at all the illustrators and all the things that are happening out there, there is a lot of brands that are just in the sort of land of artist collaboration! Yeah, that solves everything; just shake a little art on it, you know. Take that sneaker and shake a little art on it. It'll be cool. Well, nobody has any differentiation when you do that. It's completely hollow. There's no substance because there is no collaboration and that's something that we're fighting hard against and, I think we, as a design community, need to fight for that as well. We can't let our work be become hollow. So rationing, I think it's important that we just look at how we manage the time and ration and ratchet it up to how the creative process works in collaboration. You can't rush in too fast.

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There was a comment made earlier about the life cycle of a team and a group of people working together that I thought it was great insight. You need to sort of ration the process and you need to use intelligence in how you measure when you're ready to do what in the process and rationing is very important to think about. There will be rats in the system, absolutely. You need to be willing also to morph and change if something is not working, change it. That's what great about the creative process if you end up with the rat in the house that is some political maniacal freak that is breaking down the system, change it. It's design. We can move it and change it but there will be rats in the system and you have to be fearless about how you manage that. Borat.. There's all kinds of things hidden in collaboration. My friend, David, found this one actually, Mr. Covell. And finding this international language that is about multidiscipline dialogue, having the sort of international connection that happens and the stakes are very high. When you think about where international design is going in communication and the collaboration that needs to happen on that scale, the world is radically changing. We need to really think about those connections and how we communicate not only in multidisciplines but around the world because it is a tense and heavy place and there is design coming out from a lot of different directions. I, there is no I in collaboration anymore. So there is an I but you get the point. And one final story as an example is Xbox. We had really the blessing of creating a launch with an incredible network of people that was just wild. It was a great experience where we took the launch of technology, took technology as a cause and J Allard was the lead guy at Xbox that helped to drive this and guide it and what he did was bring cause to collaboration. It was not -- it guided the team internationally that was incredibly massive and complex and it was a beautiful thing to be a part of because it was guided by a cause that was about evolving people's relationship to technology and entertainment and social connection and it wasn't just about monetization. It was not just about broader audience monetization and just this maniacal gain and in Microsoft, it truly was a cause and to be part of that, if you can hook on to that belief when you're in collaboration, is just -- is unstoppable. So the Xbox experience for us was an incredible journey that was about cause. And that was an example of when it's on, it is incredible. The symphony of collaboration when it comes together and you truly are not decorating and you're bringing substance and you have your thoughts and your beliefs on, I think, we can be even more powerful because there's a lot of questioning that is happening in the industry as far as how the future of our connections are going to happen. When you think about where technology is going and the sort of we think mentality, I don't know how many of you have read Charles Leadbeater's book on We-think but it's filled with blessings and curses. There are complex issues that are happening in technology that are leading to anonymous kind of roles in collaboration that break things down and we need to be really, really careful about that. But when it's on, it's a beautiful thing so that's a little bit of a deconstruction of collaboration. It's something we need to protect as an industry. It's something that can be beautiful. It's something that can be a cancer if it's not managed correctly. And there's a few parting thoughts that I'll share with you that I think we need to look at so the questions we have are collaboration nation, what's your destination? Where are we going to take this? You know, what are the possibilities of this journey that we're on? You know, it's truly is about hooking up designers with creators and causes. We need to find the creators that are multidisciplined. We need to connect with the designers and it is really about hooking up those relationships in dynamic and unique ways. We've got to focus on what matters. I think, there's a lot of wasted energy again when you think about the politics and the rats and the layers of things that I discussed in the process. We really have to focus on what matters in collaboration because of time. What are we committing our time to? Who are we helping communicate what and why? And just think about how we get the job done, it needs to be efficient. It needs to be smart and it needs to be clear. I talked quite a bit collaboration nation and the question we have about decoration. If the work that we're doing runs the risk of being hollow in the eyes of culture when culture is shifting to a place that

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demands transparency, demands honesty, can crawl inside your brand or your cause or whatever your working on and completely alter it's course and destroy it, we need to really deliver substance in every image we're making, every concept that we're delivering, every idea, it's incredibly important that we bring substance. So we have to truly get together so the work don't end up all hollow and jaded because if that's where we end up in the collaboration nation, we're done. So protect collaboration. I'll let you be in my dream if I can be in yours.

[Music sing-a-long]

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**Michael Jager:**

Trust is a must and what you bring and the song you sing. Lust. Lust is an emotion that confuses our devotion. Loathing. Loathing is the poison that modernization is our only motivation.

[Music sing-a-long]

[Applause]

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**Michael Jager:**

Oh man. That was funny, cool.

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**Tom Kelley:**

Okay, well note to self, if you ever get the after lunch time slot, bring drums and a guitarist that worked for me. We were singing along in the back too. That was fun. That was really fun. So okay, obviously, you know, beautiful graphic linguistic deconstruction of collaboration that was really fun except when we talk about this a bit on the phone and the man said, I got stuck on one thing which was in the first -- like 2 minutes of the talk was about the weekends right, 2392 weekends, just the idea -- just the idea that the number is finite. That alone and I have to say for everyone in the room, it's finite and it has 4 digits, right. You know, it's not this kind of infinite number of weekends left in our lifetimes. In fact, for various reasons, I won't go into, I went to this site called livetoahundred.com. I don't know if that's the one you use.

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**Michael Jager:**

Yeah.

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**Tom Kelley:**

You know, do there like chocolate chip cookies and working too long and stuff like that. I got 1700 weekends left and so that's really finite, though -- though and this is a message to all the designers in the audience, the math of it is if I were to introduce my work week from 70 to 40, I could have an extra 52 weekends. So think about that, 52 extra weekends and my viewers are considering at least.

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**Michael Jager:**

The new math.

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**Tom Kelley:**

So now it's a possibly a rhetorical question but it just makes me wonder you know. We just heard from those folks who actually went out for lunch it's a beautiful day and it's one of the most interesting cities in the world and it is Friday afternoon. Should any of us be thinking about bolting and having the weekend outside?

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**Michael Jager:**

Central Park.

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**Tom Kelley:**

You know, Ric Grefé is sitting right here thinking, "no this is the best possible use of your weekend", this weekend, and so you got those 2391 to do other things but for this weekend just one weekend every two years. Yeah, I think it might be worthwhile. So I guess that was slightly rhetorical. Any retort to that? So that's a no. Okay, so you kind of addressed this but I just want to double check with you. So Donny Deutsch launches a new CNBC series called Collaboration Now on October 12th. Michael Jager deconstructs collaboration for AIGA Gain 12 days later. So coincidence, causality, or industrial espionage, what do you think?

[Laughter]

Okay, that's a rhetorical question too, isn't it?

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**Michael Jager:**

You keep them coming.

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**Tom Kelley:**

Since I am the moderator and Michael is the speaker, we should get to the question that he can, you know, actually answer. So question number 3 is look, you know, you guys have had a lot of great successes and, you know, none more famous than the Burton Snowboards. I know, that you've done lots of other things but beside that, you don't want people to constantly ask you Burton Snowboard question. So let's talk about some of the others. Either other success that weren't able to squeeze into that time 'cause you have a living room for drumming and guitaring.

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**Michael Jager:**

Yeah.

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**Tom Kelley:**

Or even more fun in some ways is, are there things that didn't go as well that you had a life lesson from or a lesson that could be useful to the audience? Got any of those?

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**Michael Jager:**

Yeah, one of the things that I'd like to talk about on the Xbox story, it was an amazing adventure as I outline and one of the things that made it so dramatic was the cause orientation that it had -- it did gather a whole force of people into this energy that was incredible. It was, you know, McCann-Erickson International we are working with 72andSunny ad agency out on the West Coast AKQA and Interactive, Edelman, Pure Partners is one that I wanna talk about in this group as well as all of the groups within Microsoft working with Don Pointer and Don Hall and the brand teams internally. It was an incredible network and it was driven by this cause and it almost got to be -- it was so engaging and powerful and everybody was so emotionally in love with what was happening when this was being born that I think we almost got too excited at one point. And one of the things that happened that I really regret and I'll be very honest about which I think when you and I talk is like, you know, have the spine to talk about things that didn't go well. And one of the things that I regret is we were all so caught up in the rush of the emotion of this exciting stuff. There was -- the design of the E3 trade show booth that was -- it's about as big as this room. It's probably -- it was 2 storeys. It's about 40,000 square feet; massive, massive undertaking

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and architectural project. It was incredible. Pure Partners was the lead on that. We did the briefing. We developed the look and feel, guided this vision of what it should be with the teams, and Pure Partner did an incredible job and the experience in this space was just phenomenal. What was interesting though is everybody was in this love fest. The photos come back from E3. Microsoft has them. They kinda pass them out to the teams like look what's accomplished. And all of our graphic language, all of our communication, all the design that we'd been working on for year and a half was the look and feel of this booth. So we excitedly got it up on our website, oh my god, look at this. We were just so stoked to share it with the world but we didn't slow down long enough to make it really clear. Well, who did what? And all of a sudden Microsoft has even gone like, man, that doesn't, it looks like you're taking credit for something that you didn't do just because we were all in this love fest of like "Oh, we're all doing this together and it's so awesome." And it was that but you got it slow down long enough to remember what the rules are and I always regretted that simple mistake of the love of collaboration that you have. You also need to really keep the eye on the ball as far as the detail. So if anybody is from Pure Partners here, peace and love and everything.

[Laughter]

Okay, but you guys kick ass and it was a beautiful booth and it was a pleasure to work with you.

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**Tom Kelley:**

This is slightly off the subject but you made me think of a story which is I asked that question once of a guy who had his own little company in San Diego and he said, "You know sometimes the small things get you." Sometimes there's some symbolism in the small thing. He said, "I launched the whole program for all of my employees called Get on the Bus which was about everybody having the same ideas and implementing the same strategy" and they actually rented a school bus and they took every employee in the company to this offsite and it was all fun. He thought it just went perfectly. He went home. He told his wife what a great day they'd have and how this Get on the Bus program is gonna really be cool. And the next day one of his young employees came up to him and said, "You know, boss that was really fun yesterday. I like the Get on the Bus thing and I'm with you on this." But he said, "I just wanted to point out in case you weren't thinking about it, when we all got back on the bus and you got on your Mercedes and drove home separately" he said, "That didn't feel so good."

[Laughter]

So sometimes it is the little things.

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**Michael Jager:**

Yeah.

[Laughter]

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**Tom Kelley:**

So you, I thought you're gonna lead to it there but you created a design principle called less Hulk, more Bruce Lee. Can you speak to that a little bit? I don't know whether it's universally applicable or specific to a specific concept.

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**Michael Jager:**

It was actually a very specific to Xbox and it was something that we, again, we worked on with the brand team trying to develop a way of looking at what this transformation from Gen1 to the Xbox 360 platform was about. And I don't know how many gamers are out there but the original Gen1 Xbox was a pretty narrowly bad ass industrial strength black box. It was like evil oozing out of it. It was pretty much what it was so it was like the Hulk of like it's the muscle and the horsepower and it was this, you know, acid green and black box. And the transition to Xbox 360 was designed to be much more accessible in welcoming and beautiful and it was the form factor completely changed and it was smooth and elegant, and gaming was changing and inviting more people in. But it still had an edge. I mean, gaming is about competition and edge and, you know, it's entertainment as unique in that way. So I had to have a little -- you have to have a picture of what that would be in a vision for people. So we looked at this transition from the Hulk transitioning to Bruce Lee. So it's still pretty dangerous and bad ass but it's suave and elegant at the same time. So that was our philosophy and it guided our typography, it guided our color, it guided form factor, everything, and it was very useful.

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**Tom Kelley:**

So, you know, the thing about collaboration, you know, it sounds like a really good idea and yet lots of people not doing it well. I look at -- into our past and feel like we didn't always get it right. Are there people so outside of your firm -- are there people that you say are there -- are there teams you're aware of or the companies that -- did you feel like get it right as far as collaboration?

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**Michael Jager:**

Yeah, well, after hearing the PNG presentation, I wanna go work at PNG. I would love 3 weeks to think about something like that. I do think there are some people who'd have some collaborative relationships that I think are really fascinating. We worked with Patagonia and launching the Patagonia footwear and there was a relationship there that's seemingly small but very, very important. Jeff McFedrich is a designer who probably many of you know did absolutely beautiful work and we've been lucky enough to work with him on Burton a few times. But his relationship with Patagonia, the collaboration that exists there because he is so a part of their cause and what Yvon and their culture stand for, the artwork that he makes, the insights and the connections that then kind of morph and adopt to the product, there is a sort of simultaneous -- there's beautiful synapse that happens between them and we were able to be part of that on the footwear where his art would combine with art we were making on form factors and finishes on the material on the shoes and concepts for the shoes working with the design team and developers of the shoe designs and, of course, Patagonia. And, I think, it was a really, though it's fairly small in the context of things like Microsoft or something, it's just really beautiful and powerful and I think an example we could all look at but it's really about understanding each other and truth and honesty and transparency it's amazing. If you like Jeff's work, you should check out what he did with Patagonia and his doing.

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**Tom Kelley:**

Well alright, thank you very much.

[Applause]

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**Michael Jager:**

Peace!